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Community Page

Program helps girls deal with bullying

Action for Safety teaches more than just physical self defence techniques

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
The Champion

There's no minimum age requirement for bullying, and it certainly doesn't discriminate against the fairer sex.

With that in mind, a relatively new local program aims to arm young girls with the verbal skills to diffuse schoolyard confrontations, as well as self defence techniques for when that's just not possible.

Started up late last year and now in its second three-month session — made possible through funding by the Milton Lions Club — Action for Safety is a joint venture between Girls Incorporated of Halton (formerly Big Sisters of North Halton) and the Milton School of Jiu Jitsu. Classes are held Wednesday evenings, under the direction of long-time martial arts instructor Darlene Kranz.

"There's obviously the self-defence and physical fitness component of it, but the program also teaches verbal assertiveness training and conflict resolution techniques," explained Girls Inc. Executive Director Claudia Scobie. "The skills help girls increase both their sense of personal safety and their ability to take a leadership in their communities to reduce violence and its effects."

Set in a non-threatening, small-group environment, Action for Safety has had an immediate impact on its young participants, including nine-year-old Emma.

"I'm learning how to do a lot of things safely, like break falls, and it's given me more confidence," she said.

Best friend and fellow group member Shannon, 10, stresses that a program like Action for Safety is necessary, because sadly enough, bullying is a very real problem — even at her age.

"We're told to get a teacher if there's any trouble, but sometimes that's not possible," she explained. "I wouldn't use them (self defence techniques) unless it was absolutely, positively necessary, but I'm not afraid to use them. We're also taught verbal skills to try to solve problems without violence. I've done that."

'Big Sister' Jennifer Jones said that while Shannon's always been fairly confident, Action for Safety has done wonders for her.

"It's given her something to look for-

"The skills help girls increase both their sense of personal safety and their ability to take a leadership in their communities to reduce violence and its effects."

CLAUDIA SCOBIE

ward to every Wednesday and someone to look up to in Darlene," said Ms Jones. "The girls see her as a strong woman and want to learn from her."

Ten-year-old participant Kennedy admits that her cousin has been a victim of bullying and that her recent self defence training has given her a sense of empowerment.

She added, "It'll help keep me safe and allow me to stand up for myself, and not by fighting."

While certainly no stranger to self defence training, Ms Kranz said teaching young girls presents a unique challenge.

"I've had to make some adjustments and really add the element of fun, because otherwise they just don't learn."

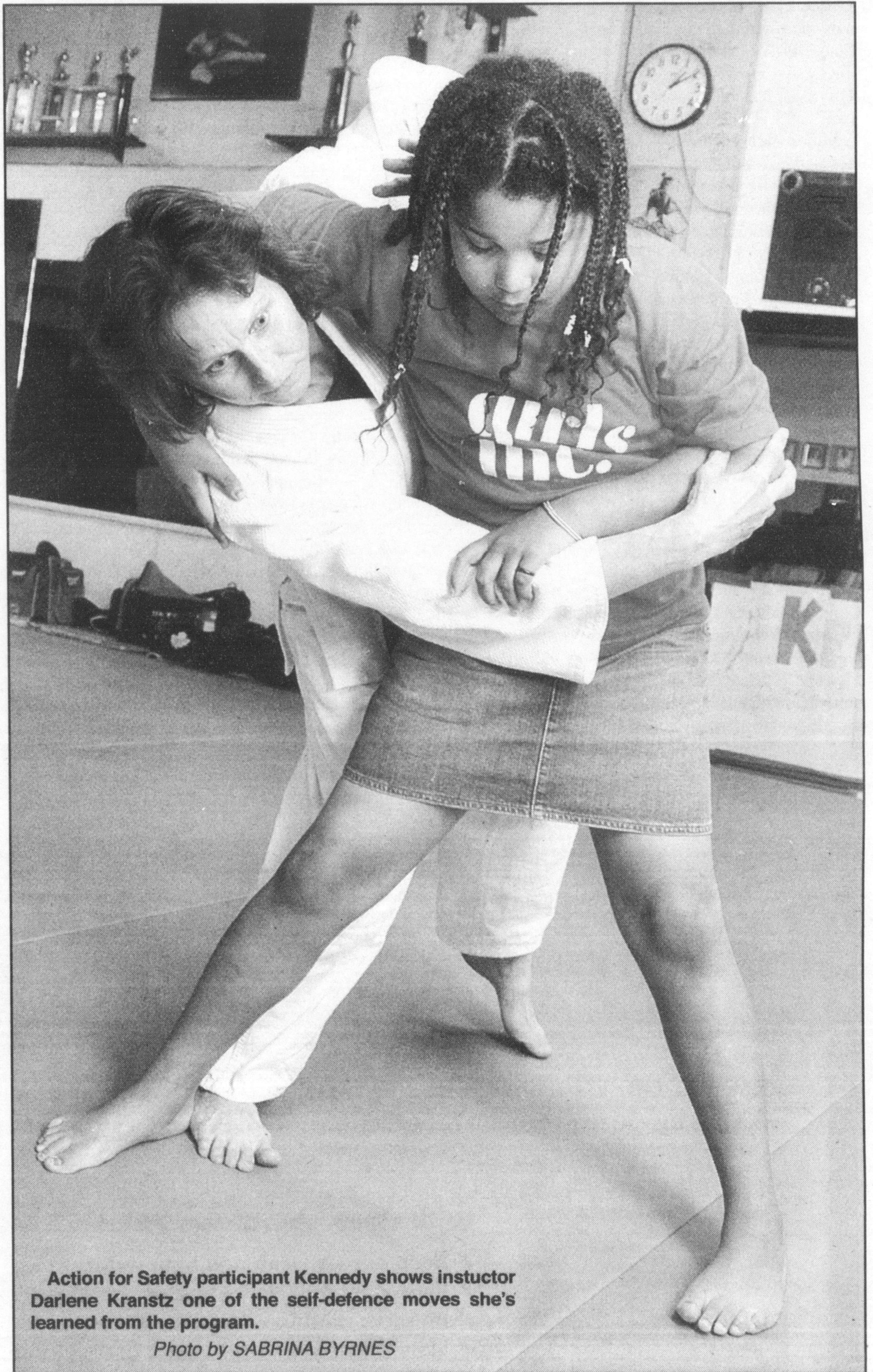
While Action for Safety's still quite new, its instructor said its effects are already quite evident.

"We had some girls come here that were somewhat withdrawn, unsure of themselves and really just nervous," recalled Kranz. "But I can see the confidence building in them. What we're trying to do is create a foundation, not just for now but later so that by the time they enter high school they're more prepared to deal with peer pressure and say 'No' to some of the things that could threaten their well being."

"The key is to get these girls to feel comfortable and secure. That's what allows you to go forward positively."

Action for Safety still has three spots available for its spring session, which began just last week. Anyone interested in joining can call Ms Scobie at (905) 854-9953 or e-mail her at girlsinchalton@aol.com.

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Action for Safety participant Kennedy shows instructor Darlene Kranz one of the self-defence moves she's learned from the program.

Photo by SABRINA BYRNES

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Programming Schedule — Tuesday, April 19 - Monday, April 25, 2005

Tuesday, April 19	Wednesday, April 20	Thursday, April 21	Friday, April 22	Saturday, April 23	Sunday, April 24	Monday, April 25
5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	6:00pm Simply Halton	6:00pm Simply Halton	5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	4:00pm TVCogeco Sports: TBA	10:30am TVCogeco Sports: TBA	1:00pm-6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
6:00pm Osler Health Connection	6:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	6:30pm Osler Health Connection	6:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	6:00pm - 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	5:00pm Living Healthy: Depression	6:00pm Living Healthy: Depression
6:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	7:00pm Swap Talk (Live)	7:00pm Living Healthy - Depression		8:00pm War Amps: Dieppe: Don't Call It A Failure	6:00pm Osler Health Connection	7:00pm War Amps: Dieppe: Don't Call It A Failure
7:30pm Simply Halton	8:00pm Auto Experts (Live)	8:00pm Halton Region Council			6:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00pm SportsZONE Live
8:00pm Halton Hills Council April 18	9:00pm Juno Beach to Caen				7:30pm Simply Halton	
10:30pm TV Cogeco Sports: Jr. A. Hockey St. Michael's at Georgetown Game 7						

Optimist TV Bingo will return Tuesday, April 26th, 6:30pm